

## [Random Notes]

[?] Dup.

Aug 8 1939

FOLKLORE

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NEW YORK Form to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 W. 144 St. 557 W. 144 St.

DATE July 6, 1939

SUBJECT Random Notes

1. Date and time of interview During month of June

2. Place of interview

Bar — aborad ship — union hall

3. Name and address of informant

4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.

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5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you

6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM C

TEXT OF INTERVIEW (UNEDITED)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Saul Levitt Herman Partnow

ADDRESS 557 W. 144 St. 557 W. 144 St.

DATE June 6, 1939

SUBJECT Maritime Folklore

NOTES: At bar, Union hall, aboard ship

Didjeever see a ship tie up? They got big round discs on the ropes. Big round discs like that. They call them rat guards. Doncha know a rat can't go past them guards? Sure! After the hold's cleared out we have to go down there sometimes an' scald them with hot steam...On a long run everything's lashed down. Batten down the hatches, lash everything down. If she rocks too much ye just have sandwiches. Like on the Lamont Du Pont. We had the tables holed down. We was comin through Hatteras, the graveyard of the Atlantic...The Marro Castle I would say it was more of the company's fault. They hired schoolboys and college boys that don' know how to lower a boat. The passengers was a lot of stumblebums, tourists, people never been an a ship, dressed up bums. Her

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stern was up in the air, they sunk bow first in other words. Just like a fish with the goddam screws wigglin like a tailfin. The crew was panic-stricken it was before the Union. This friend of mine an old time seaman he took a look around an saw there was nothin he could do...That ship was burnin for three days — no SOS no nothin. The crew knew about it and they was laughing about it 2 and they was laughing about it among themselves. They could have beached it they was three miles off shore...A drill is essential on a ship. When the bell rings they lower away just to get the hand of it. There was no drills on the Morro Castle. A good crew can launch a boat in five minutes. The first mate in all things he was wrong...The friggin monkeys that buy ships that's condemned, take 'em out in the middle of the ocean. J. J. Coney, that was an old friggin' boat — her bow was stoved in — (sixty day ships) — she blowed up once. I remember a storm, takin high seas down the stack, her turbines revolvin, aft end is out of water — and she shook the goddam Coney like a fish.

The bilges is the furthest down. Floor tops, tank tops — the bilges is under them yet. A ship is a regular factory all its own. They got all kinds of spare parts an the engineer knows how to repair on board like a plumber or mechanic ashore. The [deck?] man's equipment: it's oilskins — raincoat, boots, souwester. They carry their suits with em in case they wanna dress up when they go ashore.

Schooner rig, that's what ye got on your back when you sail an no more. They got a slop chest on board ship. Everybody's after the seamen's dough: guys are bigger crooks around the waterfront than Jessie James ever thought of being. First, clothing, suits, you van a suit cheap?, bartenders, rubber goods, booze, each guy is after his cut when the sailor gets paid off. They all range in line. Then a cab driver hangin around to drive him aroun town he gets his cut. They're all after the seamen anyway regardless...Take this joint we got credit here . If you're onna beach he'll [give?] ye a feed an beer. If a guy runs out on him we go after him an dump him. He's marked lousy. Why that puts us in bad with the bartender, ye get it? Them seamen's houses they're the worst goddam!...They got the color of your money: goodby. There's people that donate money an think it's going for the

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seamen but that ain't so. Perrisites all over, bartenders, clothing, peedlers, razors, rubber goods, seamen's institutions — and people 3 give money thinkin' the seamen are actually gettin the benefit...But some of these bartenders are damn good people — gives us five dollar meal tickets —guy ran out on him last week I just told him to get off the waterfront and stay off the waterfront...Eight bells it's for the watch the eight to twelve, four to eight, twelve to four...Two bells is ten minutes to the watch. (When Mussolini got in)...Didjever hear a seaman say fight chafrigginfootrace? I'll fightcha friggin footrace! But it never gets to the footrace because they'll always fight. You can't pull a strike on the ocean that's mutiny. But I had a buddy pulled a slowdown strike. You're doin' the work but there's no law that says how fast I gotta work. They can't fire ya in the middle of the ocean.

(Watch): One at the crow's nest and one at the bow. A seaman gotta report a light regardless. He puts his hand on the bow and spreads his fingers out. If the light is outside of his hand spread out like that they usually let er alone.

The quartermaster is the man at the wheel. An AB can sail quartermaster. Sturdy is my pal, nice feller. We're broke together always splittin a dollar...That guy! Put em in a paper bag an he'd starve to death. Some mates are good guys, some are eighteen karat punks, drop em in the drink. There's one guy he's sarcastic, southerner, he says to me 'come on wiper, do this, do that' — I punched em in the mouth. Can't take that kind of crap. Paddy Brenna boy shoulders like that: about six foot five, the toughest mate afloat. He punched a fireman once an near killed him. Some boys got Paddy once, they hung em on a telephone pole in Brooklyn. There's a guy! He had a feud on with a fireman he follered him around. Coincidence ya know: they meet on one ship on another, that Paddy's stretch em out. But he can't do it no more. Used to have a lot of aliens onna ships mate smacks em but they're afraid to hit back they're afraid of bein deported...When you sign articles they bind you up. They 4 took me off a ship in handcuffs once, shoved them articles in front of me and said, read. Gee, they got everything there, you're all tied up. Doncha know you can't get away with anything, they said. Maybe I signed up, I said, but I still gotta live like a human being. I signed up to sleep in a bunk and eat decent, not for bedbugs, not for

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slop, not for [bilgewater?]. Not more than three men [??] to the captain's cabin, it's not written down but that's the way it is, otherwise he says it's mutiny. Two, three men to come up to the bridge an represent the men.. (Waitress): to a man at table. No I don't want no beer, I'll drink water it's the best thing the world for ye. I'm gonna fix your hair, Whitey.... Aw, come on lemme fix ye pretty.

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——Drop whiskey: one drink and ye drop.

——South American casash?: Light a cigarette after a drink and you explode.

——Mexico, tequila, mixit with five reefers and you're high.

——Hashish: I don't know what it's made of, somethin like a cabbage leaf.

——Okeleehow, (Oke): Hawaii,some kind of a root out there.

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Sturdy had a buddy. This guy was sittin with us in a tavern. He excuses himself an goes down the block an gate the dope in his arm. Young feller, we was all waitin for him includin some girls. But it got him in the heart. Some Mexican got him on dope. It affects his heart an he kicks off. Sturdy is lookin for that.guy.

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Suicides, there's been plenty. Little Jojo Curran, Mickey O'Hara, Bugs Carroll, Frenchy... The majority of seamen gets melancholy. You'd be surprised at secrets aroun the waterfront. Got a guy here his brother's a police captain, 5 another got a minister for a brother an one with a family that got a fortune. They're lost. Everybody shuns the seamen you know what I mean? Sometimes he wants to make friends but be can't. Get the blues,

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get melancholy. Most of em wanto settle down but don't. That's what they want but they never get it.

—A lot of em got homes but the sea gets them.

—You know what my ambition is — be a dictator.

—Jeesus, how did I go to sea? I run away from a girl she had three brothers... It's an independent life. Another thing you get up an you don't have to run for no subway train, you go out in the air.

(Waitress) Feller can buy two beers for two steers.

(On Stowaways)

Wop constipated nothin helped, exlax, castor-oil finally boy he did it from the top of the foc'sle clear down to the bottom.

—Dye remember three guys behin the boilers dead?

—There was a guy under the coffee when they unloaded once. Shoes aroun' his neck that's the way the longshoremen down in South America work. They take their shoes off an tie the laces n put it around their necks. Somebody evidently dropped somethin on his head, dumped em, walked off.

—Girl from England, they had her in the chainlocker, couldn't get down to feed her. Pretty near half-starved.

Now, you boys walk the [plan?] they like to do it in their pants! We had em cleaning the bilges. We got em up to Philadelphia, the twelve year kid got off his mother waitin for him but the other one sailed with us as a mess boy.

He went an tried to tear the steel door — haul his fail right back again.

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My girl's very humanitarian yeah very humanitarian I tell her I'm gonna break this guy's head she looks the other way. Listens to everybody, everybody got a right with her. I'll work from the ground up with ye. Yer broke I'll buy ya somethin to eat that's the way a seaman is.

(Someone comes over to the table): Let's have the key I wanna go up there.

—What for.

—Take a bath.

—What? Take a bath in the daytime?

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(Aboard the S. S. Manhattan) Steward dusting windows in the Lounge.

—Oh, yes, schoolteachers are very nice and behaved, they maintain their dignity and when they get off they only give you three dollars. We serve 'em tea here. This, young man, is where the elite gather, Mr. Million bucks, a few of the European nobility. I've seen bored so and so and this and that and I have better shirts than they have. (To Pepe, deck sailor) — A gorilla like you up here? I can just see you serving a weak old dame.

—She'd get tea allright in her eye.

—A good steward has to know eighteen things at once, and then one more. The passenger is always right... But they do need an awful lot of patience. They think they buy

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you, too. Oh, I've been educated, three years at Boston Normal Arts. You sign on as a sailor, you could start at almost anything. I've seen kids move up, down. Here you can't stop to have any regrets. I remember the time a Mormon Bishop was in the Lounge. It's a rather long story. My special job is to serve the priests too. We'd have quite a few of the priests, novitiate as they call them. I was getting ready to close up the lounge at three knowing that I had to be up at five. I left the room to get something and when I came back the room was pitch black. It's a number one offense for the steward to leave the room without keeping the light on. He can get into trouble. Just the entrance light was on. Up in the corner are a priest and a professor from California. I was wondering what to do next. I [?] in and switch on the light and there in the other corner is the Mormon bishop and this lady. He has very little to say. I had no idea about it before, he was a very dignified passenger. But she got indignant and said if you don't put out the light, I'll get the captain. We just got chased off the deck. The light has to [be?] on, I said, those are orders. By this time they were sore. When, where or how she didn't care... The light stayed on but that wasn't the end of it. He, being a clergyman, of course had to be dignified and all that. And he went to the trouble of letting [me?] know how he does those things — 'In an act of chivalry I wrote a letter to the office... Why? You were insulting a woman friend of mine.' I got it in the neck because they're always right. On this job you can get fired, demoted, promoted and so on. I lost pay and had to work back to my present job again.

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(Union Hall: Calls over [the?] microphone).

—Come on up here with your cards, brothers.

—Where's Gonzales? Allright Brother Gonzales, report to 53rd Street.

—Escuteras, Sabina, Bartz and Santiago! Where's Pompey?



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Allright. Mobilgas, take your signs.

—January 26 now for the Quartermaster —ok, it's sold.

—March 21, Oridnary for the Elwood — ok it's sold.

—Any watch — make up your time. There's only sixteen —we only need sixteen men. And that'll kill off this watch.

—Here's a station for Seventh Avenue and twelfth Street and I don know what the hell could be sweeter than that.

—Eleventh Avenue and 30th Street: Come on, there's nothin easier'n that.

—Here's Tenth Avenue and 31st Street — a piecard if there ever was one... Well?... Two men for Tenth Avenue and Thirty First Street — what could he easiern that?

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I'm simple, there's a lot of water under the bridge. Labor spies and labor fakers but not a thing about perteckin the seamen.

They wanna guy can operate a typewriter they need a yeoman on the ship.

## THE GOON HORRORS

The old man was supposed to be dyin' that time. The rank and file movement was under way and some of the boys got beat up so bad they got the goon horrors. The old man sent for Kelly and me that time to go uptown to this swell hotel where he's supposed to be lyin'. He sent someone inna car an' all the way u town Kelly kept lookin' outta the winder 9 fer the goon squad. An' when we got into this swell hotel Kelly looked behin' the flowers inna lobby. He sure had 'em bad. Haah! —there's the old man lyin' in a swell bunk and

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spoutin' the golden rule and me an Kelly listening to him. Golly, Kelly had his shoes off and was standin' there barefoot inna middle of winter listening to the old man spill his dyin' wishes. He was settin' it up for us, 'boys,' he said, ' the old ISU is gonna do right by you boys. I wanna see everything adjusted before I die.' There wuz the old man near to blowin' off the cork tellin' that to us, and golly he almos' had us convinced. He was gonna give us organizers' jobs or delegates I forget which but we were part of the rank and file movement. We went out without committin' ourselves an' went downtown. It was excitin' time allright. Them goon squads dumped many a good rank an' file man. Kelly looks behin' the the flowers again goin' out. To this day he's got'em so bad you'd think he got shellshocked inna war. Deir tryin' to oberfro me fer crissakes. Dis is a special job yuh know what I mean. Yuh need tack on dis job odderwise yuh got dis place fulla goons an' tugs. Hell I weigh a hunnerd an' eighty fi' pounds an' I'm up to alla dem tricks. See dem two fellas comin' in now. I gottem eyed up, fer crissakes. Lookit 'at heavy over dere blushin'. One a' dem shows his book an' d' odder guy jus' walks in with 'em but about a mont' from now I'll jes ast him fer his book an' I'll t'row that Heavy out'n his ear for crissakes. Why are dey tryin' t' overthrow me, why? Because I'm not a member a' one a' dem fractions dat's why. Because I'm a rank an' filer. Shoot, man. Dis place is filled wit' dem peanut politicians. Yuh gotta be a member a' deir fractions. Alla dis talk because dey wanna put somethin' over on me, dey got sometin' behin' all 'at smoke. But dey can't get nobody [?] hannel dis job right.

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Yuh gotta have diplomacy yuh know what I mean? Dere wuz a goon on dis waterfron' dat had everybody aroun' scared to deat' I see 'im comin' outta d' Panama Pacific rest'ran' an' he walks over an' 'says hey Tyler you're a Communis'. I ain' a Communis' but I says to [him?] fer crissakes I'm a Communis' yeah what about it? Shoot, man, I stretched dat goon out in d' alley. I'm d' perfec' man fer dis job. Dere ain' a face aroun' here dat I don't know. But dis place is fulla jealousy yuh know what I mean. Deir tryin' to' oberfrow me outta dis job.

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—Come to my arms, darlin!

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(Strike, random notes)

They give ya a medal one day and boot ya in the tail the next. We'll lick 'em. We'll get one point, next time another. We'll get recognition next time. I consider myself as good as any man walkin' this sidewalk. Most likely adventure is what gets them started goin to sea. After I came out of the War, I wanted to see a little more of the world. The first port, drink... Aw, hell, marriage, sometimes ya see, aw what the hell? ... Look at em, they think it's a joke, lookin at the sign.

—It's the best thing that ever happened here.

—I'm not a tanker man myself but a freighter.

—When I come ashore I want a good rest, walk around, see the sights, take in the shows.

—There isn't any here in this crowd that wouldn't want to travel to different countries. The NMU has straightened out many a man

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—it's made different class of seamen.

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If I seen here in a bathing suit before I married her, I never'd marry her, No Sir.

—Monocle on me — notorious character — rovin disposition — home life. -You can't be president.

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—It wouldn't hurt them officials if they took a trip, ya know, sitting aroun up there they get a bourgeois complexion. I guess it's because they ain't no home life. A wife, kids, that's home life. The Institute gives you old magazines, radio a damn old lounge — hell, that ain't no home life. A man gotta have it. I guess that's why I get gassed. But I'm no [psychologist?] ya know. I don know if ya unnerstand.

American seamen is nothing abroad. Them consuls don have any respect... Chasin a pot of gold. Not what a man says. Bronichil pneumonia.